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USAWC MILITARY STUDIES PROGRAM PAPER

**1st BATTALION, 37th ARMOR REAR DETACHMENT OPERATIONS AND FAMILY
SUPPORT GROUP ACTIVITIES DURING THE GULF WAR**

A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE MONOGRAPH

by

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INTRODUCTION

In a short six month period in 1990, the 1st Battalion, 37th Armor was alerted for war, deployed all of its personnel and equipment over 3,000 miles from an already forward deployed location, fought a major battle against a well equipped enemy over terrain they had never trained on and then redeployed the unit to its home station. The success of the operation is a tribute to the professionalism of the soldiers, the leaders and the families involved. Throughout the operation, there was a concerted effort to document problems encountered and actions taken to solve them so that they could be studied later and appropriate lessons drawn. The battalion spent the better part of a year after returning from Operation Desert Storm collecting, cataloging, and studying what had taken place. Needless to say, hundreds of lessons learned were documented in virtually every aspect of the unit's operations.

One of the most important lessons concerned the organization and functions of both the battalion rear detachment and the family support group and the interaction between the two. This paper describes the formation and operation of the rear detachment and family support group during the battalion's deployment to the Gulf War and attempts to identify some of the lessons learned.

HISTORY

The 37th Tank Battalion was formed in February, 1941 at Pine Camp, New York. It is one of the most storied tank battalions in the U.S. Army. In December, 1943, the battalion embarked for

England and on 13 July 1944, thirty-six days after D-Day, the battalion landed on Utah Beach, Normandy as part of the 4th Armored Division. The 37th, under the command of LTC Creighton Abrams, Jr. led Patton's 3rd Army south off the Brittany Peninsula and earned the French Croix de Guerre with palm for establishing a critical bridgehead over the Moselle River in September, 1944. With the onslaught of the German Ardennes offensive, the 37th received orders to proceed towards an unknown destination in Belgium to attack the German salient from the south. Originally driving to Bastogne through the small town of Bigonville, LTC Abrams and the 37th were ordered to lead Combat Command Reserve to the opposite flank of the division. After attacking all night in the dead of winter, the 37th linked up with the besieged 101st Airborne Division.

The 37th continued to fight across Germany and was in Czechoslovakia when the war ended. In all, the battalion was awarded five battle streamers, three French fourragers, and a presidential citation.

In 1978, the new main battle tank for the U.S. Army was named after General Creighton Abrams - the M1 Abrams tank. The 37th tank battalion did not see combat again until the Gulf War.

BACKGROUND

Although there had been some studies of military family separations prior to Operation Desert Shield, most of these addressed routine separations in Navy families. Very little study has been done of Army family separations. In 1984, Walter

Reed Army Institute of Research conducted a study of a battalion size deployment which resulted in a short descriptive manuscript. On December 12, 1985 248 members of 3rd Battalion, 502 Infantry, 101st Airborne Division were killed when their chartered airliner crashed on takeoff in Gander, Newfoundland while enroute back to Fort Campbell after deployment to the Sinai. This disaster and its aftermath led to some studies which highlighted the importance of support structures for military dependents. In January 1988 the Department of the Army published a pamphlet, DA pamphlet 608-47 entitled "A Guide to Establishing Family Support Groups." To date it is the only official document dealing with Army family relationships.

According to the 1984 report by the Division of Neuropsychiatry, Walter Reed Army Institute of Research

"... the Army's relationship to its families is unlike any seen previously. This new relationship is especially important when one considers that since the inception of the all-volunteer force in 1973 there are larger numbers of both first-term and career soldiers who are married. This large married content, when coupled with new organizational and mission requirements, suggests an Army - family relationship which can only intensify in coming years.

"Home basing, ... and the deployment of troops to fulfill brief peace-keeping missions or to fight short wars in areas of critical importance, are predicated on the concept that military families will remain at the post where they had been stationed before the troops deployed. In previous conflicts, families dispersed when the service members deployed and replacements and their families took their places. Today, ... when units deploy for combat missions, families will remain at their home bases and the Army will be responsible for a community of families whose active duty members are deployed. The ability of the Army to provide support to these families, particularly in times of danger and conflict, will affect the morale and well-being not only of the families, but of the deployed

soldier as well."¹

In the case of the 1st Battalion, 37th Armor, as with a number of other units, the problems were intensified because the unit was already forward deployed when it was alerted for further deployment to Southwest Asia. Many of the problems encountered were unique to units that deployed from Germany. Some problems were unique to 1-37 Armor because it was detached from its parent brigade, 1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division. The battalion was attached to 3rd Brigade, 1st Armored Division for the duration of the deployment. 1st Brigade remained in Germany and was attached to 3rd Infantry Division and assumed the mission of training reserve soldiers mobilized for the war. As a result, there was no higher headquarters rear detachment or family support group within the community. 1st Brigade was focused on its reserve training mission and often assumed rear detachment and family support matters were being handled through 3rd Brigade. 3rd Brigade rear detachment, which was located sixty miles away in Bamberg and unfamiliar with anyone in the battalion, often thought rear detachment and family support group matters were being handled through the Brigade in Vilseck. Although this situation was unique, many of the lessons are applicable to all army units.

Prior to assuming command of 1-37 Armor in June, 1990, my experience with family support structures had been limited to a previous tour in USAREUR in the mid-seventies which included a number of unit rotations to major training areas usually for a

period of three to five weeks, and one rotation to the National Training Center in 1985 while serving as the S-3 of a battalion at Fort Hood. In each of those cases, the deployments were relatively short, known of and planned well in advance and were relatively danger free.

After reading the DA pamphlet while attending the Pre-Command Course, I began to do some planning with my wife for establishing a Family Support Group in the battalion. There was no Family Support Group in place when we joined the unit. Each company had what they termed a "chain of concern" which were telephone chains which mirrored the company alert rosters. We knew that the battalion would be required to deploy at least three times a year to the major training area and wanted to ensure there was a functional support structure in place.

The battalion's first deployment after my assumption of command took place on 7 August 1990, the day President Bush announced he was sending U.S. forces to Saudi Arabia. The battalion deployed for approximately three weeks to the Combat Maneuver Training Center (CMTC) at Hohenfels.

I organized a small rear detachment consisting of soldiers under the control of the Noncombatant Evacuation Operations (NEO) NCO. Their primary function was to man the battalion headquarters, forward mail and provide minimum security for the billets and motor pool.

By that time, a battalion Family Support Group had begun to take shape. A telephone chain organized generally along the

lines of the chain of command was in place and the leadership structure for the Family Support Group at the battalion level had been organized. The battalion Family Support Group management committee consisted of myself, my wife, the Command Sergeant Major and his wife, a family member representative from each of the companies, as well as a single soldier representative. The purpose of the management committee was to coordinate overall Family Support Group activities, address family member concerns at the battalion level, and provide information to the companies.

One of the first initiatives of the Family Support Group was the establishment of a Family Support Center that operated on a daily basis during our deployment to CMTC. The Family Support Center operated for about two hours each day. It operated out of the battalion headquarters and overlapped the hours that the mail room was open. Since all mail for the soldiers and their families was delivered to the battalion, this set up made the Family Support Center easily accessible to the wives. The center was manned by volunteer wives and was intended to answer questions, provide phone numbers and points of contact to agencies around the community and provide a means to pass information to all of the families. The idea was well received and some important lessons were learned. One of those lessons was the need for a reference guide to be used by the volunteers manning the center. This idea led to the assembly of a Battalion Family Support Group Handbook which was eventually printed and distributed to all of the families in the battalion.

Shortly after our return from CMTC, another incident took place which played a role in the future activities of the battalion Family Support Group. Over a weekend in September, one of the battalion's NCOs was killed in an auto accident on the way home from staff duty. The Family Support Group played an important role in providing support to the family and assisting the survival assistance officer in helping the family prepare for their return to the states. Although there is no guidance on what that role ought to be, this unfortunate incident provided useful lessons when it came time for the battalion to deploy to combat.

By the time the battalion was alerted for deployment in November, 1990 the Family Support Group organization had matured somewhat. Steering committees were in place in each company consisting of the company commander and his wife, the company 1SG and his wife, a spouse and a single soldier. Contact groups were formed based generally on the unit organization and the location of the families quarters. Since dependant families were spread out among half a dozen different towns and villages in the surrounding areas, the contact groups were formed with 4-6 families from the same company who lived in the same town or village.

In September we published the first edition of the Battalion Command Newsletter. Information was solicited from throughout the battalion and community and copies were distributed to each soldier in the battalion. Although the first issues were rough,

the effort paid off tremendously by having a highly effective means of communication to all the families already in place when the battalion deployed to Southwest Asia.

As a result of the death of the soldier in September, we realized there was information regarding dependents that was not readily available to the unit and the Family Support Group which would be needed in the event of an emergency while the soldier was deployed. This lead to the generation of a Spouse Information Sheet which gave some basic information on each dependent, whether the spouse could drive or had access to an automobile, and if the language spoken at home was other than English. These information sheets were collected and kept on file in the battalion headquarters available to the chain of command and the Family Support Group Steering committee members. These forms were also filled out by soldiers who had dependents who were not residing with them in Germany.

1-37 ARMOR IN THE GULF CONFLICT

The 1st Battalion 37th Armor was alerted for deployment to Operation Desert Shield on 8 November, 1990. A small advance party deployed on 14 December and the main body began departing on 26 December. By 30 December, the battalion had arrived in Saudi Arabia. Vehicles and equipment which had been shipped from ports in Europe began to arrive on 4 January and by 12 January all the equipment had arrived in Saudi Arabia. When hostilities commenced on 15 January 1991, the battalion was in the process of closing the last elements into the Tactical Assembly Area (TAA).

The next month was spent task organizing, training, rehearsing, and preparing for the ground war.

On 24 February, Task Force 1-37 crossed the line of Departure (LD) as part of VII Corps' attack against Iraqi forces. On 25 February, the battalion attacked and seized the division headquarters of the Iraqi 26th Infantry Division destroying four armored vehicles, eight air defense weapons and capturing forty Enemy Prisoners of War (EPW). After attacking all day on 26 February, the task force, part of 3rd Brigade, 1st Armored Division, made contact with a brigade of the Tawakalna Armored Division of the Iraqi Republican Guard Forces Command (RGFC) which had established a defensive position to protect the flank of the RGFC and facilitate their escape from Kuwait. After a thirty minute fire fight, TF 1-37 was ordered to assault the enemy position. The assault, conducted at night, in a driving rain storm, resulted in the destruction of twenty-six T-72 tanks, forty-seven armored personnel carriers (mostly BMP's) and a handful of other vehicles, as well as the capture of over one hundred EPW's. TF 1-37 suffered the loss of four M1A1 tanks destroyed by enemy fire and six personnel wounded in action. After consolidation and reorganization, the task force continued the attack throughout the night of 26-27 February, reestablishing contact with the RGFC at approximately 0530, 27 February. The task force continued to attack, fighting numerous engagements with elements of multiple Iraqi divisions throughout the 27th and into the morning of 28 February. At 0800 local time, 28

February, the task force established a hasty defensive position astride the Iraq - Kuwait border. During the last 28 hours of the attack, the task force destroyed an additional thirty-one tanks of various types, thirty-one BMPs, numerous other APCs, air defense weapons and trucks, and captured over 200 EPWs.

Four days after the cease fire, the task force moved nine miles further into Kuwait. Two missions were conducted to destroy additional enemy weapons, ammunition and equipment, bury enemy remains, and to recover the four M1A1's which had been destroyed on 26 February.

On 24 March, the task force moved back into Iraq and established a defensive position in the vicinity of the Rumayilah oil fields. For the next three weeks, task force missions centered on refugee assistance and security operations. On the 10th of April TF 1-37 began movement to a Rear Assembly Area (RAA) in the vicinity of King Khalid Military City (KKMC), Saudi Arabia. By 13 April, the task force had closed into the RAA and preparations began for the redeployment of the unit to Germany. Between 19 and 21 April, the battalion moved all its vehicles and approximately half its personnel to the port of Dammam where the vehicles were prepared for shipment back to Europe. On 25 April the battalion personnel began departing from Dammam and KKMC and by 1 May, all but a small detachment had returned to Germany.

FAMILY PREPARATIONS FOR DEPLOYMENT

When the battalion was alerted for deployment in November, we organized a Preparation for Overseas Movement (POM) exercise

focused on the families. During the POM each soldier was given the opportunity to make out a will and any necessary powers of attorney. We encouraged the soldiers to give their spouse a general power of attorney as well as any special powers they felt necessary. Identification cards, USAREUR drivers licenses, and automobile registrations were checked. Identification cards due to expire within the next year were replaced on the spot. Working with the local Military Police unit, we were also able to arrange to have drivers licenses and car registrations that were due to expire within the next year renewed. We made sure that each soldier who had dependents in Germany or CONUS had a valid bank account and that the dependents had access to adequate funds. During the process, we found a number of soldiers who, either intentionally or unintentionally, failed to identify dependents who were living in CONUS. Thereafter, it became a standard procedure to compare the spouse information sheet with the soldiers leave and earning statements to verify dependents. We also made sure that each dependent was registered in DEERS.

A major issue which surfaced immediately upon our alert notification was the status of family care plans for soldiers who were single parents or joint domicile with both parents deploying. The family care plans that were in place at that time were based on the assumption that any deployment would be within NATO and accompanied by a Noncombatant Evacuation Operation. In that case, all the dependents would be evacuated from the theater and the dependent children of single parents or joint domicile

soldiers would travel with their designated care provider. When the unit was alerted for deployment out of the theater, some designated care providers decided that they would return to the U.S. and therefore required the parents to reestablish a family care plan. If the designated care provider made the decision prior to the unit deploying, the problem was able to be solved, albeit with some difficulty. The major problem arose when a designated provider who had originally indicated she would be staying in Germany throughout the deployment changed her mind and decided to return to the U.S. well after the unit had deployed and hostilities had commenced. This caused me to have to send the sponsor back to Germany at a critical time. It was a problem which had not been foreseen before we deployed. In retrospect, however, we realized that no plans had been made for the case in which the designated care provider's sponsor became a casualty which would have necessitated her move back to CONUS. In that case, an alternate care provider would have to be designated or permission given to return with the care provider.

REAR DETACHMENT OPERATIONS

One of the first major decisions I had to make after the battalion was alerted for deployment was the choice of a rear detachment Officer in Charge (OIC), NCOIC, and the make up of the rear detachment. It was a decision I was unprepared to make. Having never been part of a unit that deployed under these circumstances, I was unaware of the skills required of a Rear Detachment OIC. As far as I have been able to determine, there

is no written guidance, and none was available in the command. I chose a captain who had recently been assigned to the battalion after a year on the brigade staff. I chose him for all the wrong reasons. His wife was pregnant and due in January and this would give him an opportunity to be home when the baby was born. I felt I needed an officer in the grade of captain who would have the experience to deal with a large number of extraordinary problems including protecting the battalion's interests within our parent brigade since the remainder of the brigade was not deploying. However, I chose a captain who I had already determined was not yet ready to assume command of a company and I would not have given command to in the event a company command became available due to casualties. Unfortunately, the officer I chose lacked the highly refined people skills which are critical when dealing with 250 wives in an extremely stressful situation. This experience has convinced me that the choice of a rear detachment commander is critical. The individual must have the same organizational skills and interpersonal skills required to be a successful company commander. He or she must be able to work independently in a high stress environment. This presents the commander with an obvious dilemma. These same skills are the ones that cause a commander to want that officer to deploy with the unit. My experience, however, has led me to believe that a commander cannot afford not to leave a high caliber officer in charge of the rear detachment.

For the position of NCOIC I chose a staff sergeant from the

S-1 section. In general he was an effective NCOIC who got along well with the wives and performed well as a leader in a tough situation. The remainder of the rear detachment was filled with approximately six junior enlisted soldiers chosen for no particular reason other than some had temporary profiles which would have hindered their performance during deployment. We did however, leave behind the battalion mail clerk because he had been in the unit for some time and was familiar with most of the wives in the battalion. This was an important benefit to the Family Support Group

One of the first missions of the rear detachment was to account for and sign for all of the station property which was to be left behind by the battalion. Again, there was no written guidance that we could find on how property accountability should be handled. Since there were no provisions to create a separate property book for the rear detachment, all the property had to be signed over to the Rear Detachment OIC on individual separate hand receipts from each of the company commanders. Obviously, with everything else that was going on in preparation for deployment, this particular task was not a high priority for the company commanders and did not receive the attention that it deserved. After the battalion deployed, the battalion area was used by the parent brigade headquarters to house Individual Ready Reservists who were deployed from CONUS for training. This caused station property to be moved and in the end accountability was lost for a significant amount of property.

Another issue which arose was the legal status of the soldiers in the Rear Detachment. Since the Rear Detachment OIC was not a commander, he did not have article 15 authority. There were many discussions with the parent brigade headquarters regarding personnel accountability, UCMJ authority, and a host of other personnel related issues. As it turned out, there were no satisfactory answers. For UCMJ purposes, the Rear Detachment was attached to the headquarters company of the parent brigade whose company commander held article 15 authority. Since the soldiers were assigned to the battalion we could not requisition against the TOE position they filled. Therefore, the battalion in the field was always short. We tried a number of different solutions, including creating a carrier UIC, but found no satisfactory answers.

Prior to deployment, I held two meetings with the Rear Detachment leadership. In the first, I met with the OIC and NCOIC and explained to them what I saw as their mission and what I expected of them. We decided on a weekly report format that would be provided to me through normal mail channels. The report was intended as a means for the Rear Detachment OIC to identify personnel issues, security issues, operations and training issues, and supply issues. Unfortunately, we were not able to determine the effectiveness of the reports because they were never completed or forwarded by the OIC. I did not require the reports to be provided to or through the parent brigade headquarters, so there was no means to force compliance with the

requirement. The second meeting was held with the leadership of the Rear Detachment and members of the Family Support Group Steering Committee. The purpose of this meeting was to ensure everyone knew the roles each was to play and to coordinate the interrelationship between the two groups. When this meeting concluded, I was confident everyone understood their roles and the operation was off to a smooth start. Unfortunately, I was mistaken.

Although we had purchased the MARS radio equipment in order to have communications with the Rear Detachment, we were unable to use it prior to the cessation of hostilities for security reasons. The soldiers did have access to phone banks set up by AT&T and most, including the leadership, were able to phone home on a regular basis. This caused another problem, however, in that a great deal of misinformation was passed to spouses and many wild, unfounded rumors were started as a result. The Rear Detachment was unable to effectively deal with the rumors because there was no readily available means for official information to be passed. On two occasions prior to the beginning of the ground campaign, I was able to access the division commander's satellite communications and place a call to the brigade commander in Vilseck who passed on the information to the Rear Detachment. Otherwise, the only quasi-official information available to the Rear Detachment was from the leadership through their spouses.

CASUALTY NOTIFICATION

The final big issue that was raised prior to deployment was the notification of next of kin (NOK) in the event of casualties. This was an extremely important issue to me and a very emotional issue with the families. I wanted to ensure that we made use of the lessons learned as a result of the soldier's death in September. After discussions with the parent brigade commander, it was decided that notification would be done by the Rear Detachment OIC who would be accompanied by a community chaplain, the battalion commander's wife, and the wife of the Command Sergeant Major. This procedure was briefed to all the wives at one of our predeployment briefings and was well received. Unfortunately the situation changed upon deployment. Just prior to deployment, the parent brigade commander left the brigade to take command of another brigade which was deploying. The parent brigade executive officer assumed command and was still in command when the battalion deployed. After we deployed, the 7th Army Training Center commander, who was also the community commander, decided that any NOK notification would be done by members of the community staff and would not involve the rear detachment or the Family Support Group. Although the rear detachment, the Family Support Group and the parent brigade headquarters, including the new brigade commander, attempted to change the policy, there was never any satisfactory resolution.

As it turned out, there were no death notifications required. There were, however, six members of the battalion who were wounded. Four of the wounded soldiers were married. Of the

four, three of the wives resided in Germany and one had returned to CONUS for the duration of the deployment. DOD Instruction 1300.9 covers the notification of NOK for soldiers killed in action, missing in action, captured, or seriously wounded. Seriously wounded are defined as those classified as serious or very serious by competent medical personnel; or those in which the member is physically or mentally incapable of communicating with next of kin or has suffered serious disfigurement, major diminution of sight or hearing or loss of a major extremity. In the case of seriously wounded, NOK notification is only done whenever personnel availability and other resources permit.² The notification of the families of the wounded in 1-37 was done internally.

As part of our deployment preparation, we had purchased Military Affiliated Radio Station (MARS) radio equipment which could be wired into our Radio Teletype equipment and allow us to communicate with the rear detachment through the MARS station located in the community. We were unable to use the equipment prior to the cease fire due to signal security requirements. However, the day after the cessation of hostilities, we hooked up the equipment and immediately established communications with the rear detachment. Since the rear detachment OIC was not present at the time and my wife was, I informed her of the casualties and the details surrounding them. Knowing the sensitivity of the information, she immediately informed the parent brigade executive officer who made arrangements for the notification of

the families. Even though five of the six casualties were evacuated out of the theater and eventually rejoined the battalion at home station, there was never any official notification made to the families of the soldiers wounded. The wife who had returned to the U.S. was notified when her husband called her. The families of the two single soldiers presumably were notified the same way. Other than some hard feelings on the part of families who were not notified in a timely manner there was no immediate impact on the battalion. However, two problem areas deserve attention. The first is the lack of a formal link between the NOK notification process and the unit rear detachment and Family Support Group. The second problem is the current policy not to notify the families of less than seriously wounded personnel. This policy was adopted by the Department of Defense because in previous conflicts, the magnitude of notification of non serious casualties has been too great as to be overwhelming. The involvement of the rear detachment and Family Support Group could help solve this problem.

FAMILY SUPPORT GROUP ACTIVITIES

By the time the battalion deployed to Southwest Asia, the Family Support Center which had been started during our deployment to Hohenfels was working smoothly. Family Support Center volunteers were colocated with the Staff Duty NCO and maintained a daily log of activities and phone calls. The Family Support Center was normally operated from 1500 hrs to 1900 hrs each day. An improved version of the Family Support Group

Handbook was available as a reference guide and all of the agencies on post and in the local area were aware of the Family Support Center operation. The battalion mail room was kept open during the same hours which meant that the Family Support Center volunteers had the opportunity to see most of the wives each day. Often, wives would read letters from their husbands while still in the Family Support Center, and pass information from the letter to the volunteers. The volunteers would then share the information with other wives. We found this to be an excellent means of passing information informally among the families. In addition, each contact person was requested to contact each member of their contact group at least once per week. Most did it on the average of twice per week.

Beginning the week after the battalion deployed, the Family Support Group began weekly meetings for all the families. The meetings were usually held on a Saturday evening and were centered around some activity. Activities scheduled included classes on check writing and balancing a budget, dealing with separation, and a self esteem workshop. Shopping trips were organized and other outings such as ice skating and swimming were planned. When no other activity was planned for Saturday evening, the Family Support Group would get together and play Bingo. Babysitting was provided free of charge by volunteer teens from the battalion. We found that these meetings were another good opportunity for the wives to share information and just spend time together.

Another activity which the Family Support Group initiated was an opportunity for the families to send a video message to their husbands and fathers. A room was set up in the battalion headquarters with a video camera which had been donated. Each family was given the opportunity to put a message on the video and then it was mailed to the battalion in the desert. The battalion also had the capability to video tape message from the soldiers and send them back to the families.

As indicated earlier, one of the initiatives we took before we deployed was to acquire MARS equipment to be able to establish communications between the battalion in the desert and the rear detachment. As it turned out, some major telephone companies were able to establish phone banks in the desert which were available to most of the soldiers. However, even when these were available, they normally required long rides across the desert, standing in line for long periods of time, and were expensive for the soldiers. Once hostilities ceased, MARS equipment allowed us to establish radio-telephone communications with the families in Germany, and occasionally, with families in the U.S. Since the MARS equipment was hooked up to the radio teletype equipment in the communication platoon's M-577, we were able to move it around to each company position on a daily basis. The Family Support Group made arrangements with the MARS station in Vilseck for the calls to be patched to the battalion headquarters. We then were able to tell the rear detachment which company would have the MARS equipment the next day and what time they would be calling.

The rear detachment and Family Support Group then coordinated for the wives and families from that company to be at the battalion headquarters at the proper time. For the months after the cessation of hostilities, at least, this system gave most soldiers whose families were in Germany a chance to talk to them for free about once a week.

One of the most important institutions with which the Family Support Group established a close working relationship with were the local schools. My wife was the school nurse for the elementary school and the Command Sergeant Major's wife worked as a counsellor both at the elementary and high school. When not deployed the battalion "sponsored" the schools in terms of providing logistical support for school activities so there was already a very positive relationship established. Consequently, the Family Support Group and the schools worked closely to help provide written material for both students and teachers and to provide other services that were needed due to the extraordinary circumstances. The Family Support Group also made arrangements for the MARS telephone calls to go directly to the schools and arranged with the principals to make the children available to take the calls.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The 1st Battalion, 37th Armor's experience in Operation Desert Shield/Storm was extremely positive. In earning two battle streamers and a nomination for the Valorous Unit Award, it proved that it was well trained and highly capable. However,

there are some important lessons that can be drawn from the battalion's experience concerning rear detachment operations and the Family Support Group activities. The following recommendations are offered as a starting point to begin to address some of the problems we encountered.

There is no provision in the structure of any unit in the Army for the formation of a rear detachment. Yet every unit with which I am familiar uses a rear detachment of one sort or another whenever it deploys, whether for three weeks to the National Training Center, or to an operation like Just Cause or Desert Storm. There is no guidance, no established procedures, no rules that govern how a rear detachment should be organized. We need to recognize that in the future, an average battalion can expect many such deployments. Although we may not see another Desert Shield/Desert Storm, a Somalia type operation will probably become common place. This clearly means the Army needs to redefine its policy in regards to the operation of rear detachments. The Army needs to publish guidance on rear detachment organization at each organizational level. This document should indicate the relationship between rear detachments at different levels. It should define the duties and responsibilities of the rear detachments, including the relationship between the rear detachment and the Family Support Group, and what resources should be made available to the rear detachment. Property accountability procedures and reporting requirements should also be included. The guidance should also

stress the requirement for unit commanders and rear detachment OICs to communicate on a regular and frequent basis. The increased availability of instant communications between soldiers and their families on the modern battlefield carries the associated potential for the spread of misinformation. As earlier studies indicated, and our experience validated, the rear detachment is the only official source of information available to the families. Therefore, the rear detachment OIC must be in constant communication with the unit commander. There are security risks associated with these requirements, but they can be dealt with through command guidance as was done during Desert Storm. The last and maybe the most important policy change required would be to allow units notified for deployment to requisition personnel to fill the TOE positions vacated by individuals assigned to the rear detachment.

The Department of Defense is currently studying changes to its next of kin notification procedures. The rear detachment, as well as the Family Support Group, should become a part of the notification procedure. They are an important source of information that could be critical to a notification officer. Information such as health problems in the family or other-than-English language requirements is available to the rear detachment and could prove extremely important. In addition, involvement of the support structure offered by the Family Support Group could make the process much easier. This has been demonstrated on many occasions at training deaths in units throughout the Army.

At the same time, rear detachments offer the Army an opportunity to make notification to the families of other than seriously wounded soldiers. With a requirement for regular communications between unit commanders and rear detachments, casualty information could be passed to the rear detachment OIC who could then notify the families.

Family Support Group operations need to be institutionalized at all levels. With the likely increase in future deployments to peacekeeping operations or regional conflicts, units cannot afford to wait until notification for deployment to form a Family Support Group. Nor can the unit rely on the hope that the commander or spouse has taken the time to insure the Family Support Group is functioning. A more definitive set of guidelines than those available in DA Pamphlet 608-47 needs to be established. More importantly, formal training needs to be made available to leaders' spouses beginning early in the soldiers' careers. Making training available to soldiers' spouses as early as during basic NCO schooling (BNCOC) and Officer basic courses that cover such things as the purpose and functions of Family Support Groups, support facilities available in the Army and in the community, would build a solid base for expanded training during the pre-command courses. These courses would not be mandatory, but made available to spouses who wish to attend and in exportable packages in the form of video tapes issued to the soldier attending the leadership courses. Although not always the case, the senior leaders' spouse is frequently the most

experienced in interacting with the military. They are also normally more mature, by virtue of their greater variety of life experiences, have more developed social skills, and by virtue of their position are better able to gain the confidence and respect of other leaders in the community. These advantages need to be capitalized on by making available formal training at each level as the soldier leader's responsibilities increase.

One need only to read the last chapter of LTG Hal Moore's book, We Were Soldiers Once and Young, to realize how much the army has changed in the last thirty years. In that chapter, Mrs. Moore describes the problems associated with families required to move out of government quarters when the unit deployed to Vietnam, and the horrors of next of kin being notified of their loved one's death by drunk taxi cab drivers delivering impersonal telegrams in the middle of the night.' The Army as an institution has improved tremendously in its ability and willingness to take care of families. There is room for improvement, however. These recommendations are based on the experience of one battalion during a relatively short conflict with few casualties. U.S. Army operations in the future will likely include scenarios not dissimilar to what we experienced in the Gulf War.

ENDNOTES

1. E. W. Van Vranken, Linda R. Jellen, Kathryn H.M. Marlowe, Mady W. Segal, The Impact of Deployment Separation on Army Families, Washington, D.C.: Walter Reed Army Institute of Research, August, 1984, p. 1.

2. U.S. Department of Defense Directive 1300.9, Military Personnel Casualties Notification and Assistance to Next of Kin, Washington, D.C.: Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Manpower and Reserve Affairs), 23 March, 1973, pp. 1-2.

3. Harold G. Moore and Joseph L. Galloway, We Were Soldiers Once . . . And Young, New York: Random House, 1992, pp. 322-337.

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